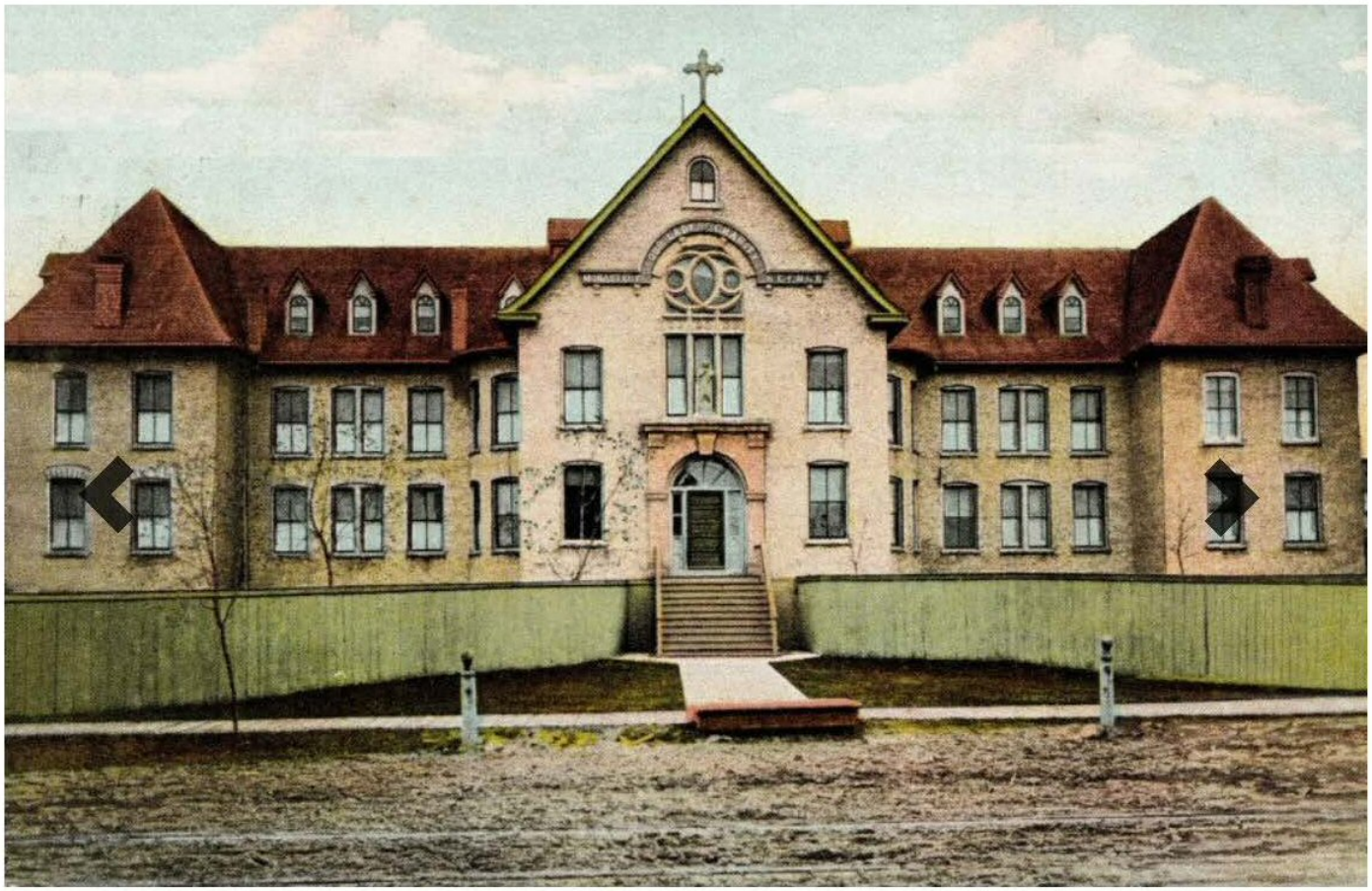
Retired from the world



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In 1896, the sisters sold the three-lot property facing St. John's Park to the Sisters of St. Joseph, as their new convent was being completed on Webster Avenue and Porlier Street across from St. Vincent's Hospital.

AC BOSSELMAN POSTCARD

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By Kris Leonhardt

MMC Senior Editor

GREEN BAY – "For many, many years, ever since it was established in 1882, there has been an atmosphere of mystery connected with the Monastery of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge, or the 'Good Shepherd Home,' as it is commonly but erroneously called," Kate McGuire wrote in a December 1941 edition of the Press-Gazette.

"It is as if those high, gray walls that surround the one-block area held a strange, forbidding secret for many citizens of Green Bay.

“Many stories, both good and bad, have been whispered about concerning the place; stories with no just cause and with very little truth behind them.”

The reason for the perceived secrecy — the facility was a “cloistered” convent — a home for nuns living in seclusion from the outside world, devoted to prayer and acts of charity.

The Sisters of Our Lady of Charity was an order formed in the 17th century in France in dedication to the care, rehabilitation and education of girls and young women in difficult situations or experiencing homelessness.

The Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd was formed in 1835, when a new governing structure was created.

Seven years later, five sisters were sent to the United States to establish houses.

After establishing residency in a four-bedroom home at the intersection of Madison and Milwaukee Streets in Green Bay in 1882, newspaper accounts told the story of challenge, as the order struggled to provide basic necessities.

But in time, they were doing well and able to take women and girls into their community; the number of young girls living at the convent reached 15 in 1885 and 1886.

In 1896, the sisters sold the three-lot property facing St. John’s Park to the Sisters of St. Joseph, as their new convent was being completed on Webster Avenue and Porlier Street across from St. Vincent’s Hospital.

With no reformatory in the state of Wisconsin for women and girls, there was no institution in which to place sentence for convicted females, except the local jail or Waupun prison, so some women were sentenced to the “Good Shepherd Home.”

In 1914, the Wisconsin State Board of Control sent an inspector to the facility.

“The large modern building is surrounded by a high stone wall. It is one of the finest institutions I have visited,” the inspector reported. There are about 150 pupils. These pupils are well taken care of, and are taught music, housekeeping and are given an eighth-grade education.”

That same year, a new chapel on the property was dedicated by Bishop Joseph J. Fox.

The sisters not only gave refuge to young “wayward” girls but also became home to women over 18 who wanted to “retire from the world” and labor and pray at the convent — called the Magdalenes.

The convent was dependent on a thriving laundry business to provide for the three groups of residents in the facility.

The institution later became known as the Our Lady of Charity School for Girls.

In February 1957, the Our Lady of Charity Guild was organized to work alongside the sisters and aid in fundraising for a new facility.

The sisters broke ground, December 1961, on a $2 million facility on a 43-acre tract of land on the west side.

The facility opened at 2640 West Point Road in 1963 and by 1968, included a gymnasium and indoor pool.

The Porlier property was sold to St. Vincent's, which had constructed a new hospital facility and the building was razed shortly after.